



**THE POWER OF UNITY OF THE BLACKS  
AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION  
PORTRAYED IN AVA DUVERNAY'S *SELMA*  
MOVIE**

**A FINAL PROJECT**

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements For the  
S-1 Degree Majoring American Cultural Studies in  
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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer states truthfully that this project is compiled by her without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, the writer ascertains that she does not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in references.

Semarang, Juli 2019

Maria Friska Theresa L.

## **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

*“Do not wait for your future, because today is already the future of your past”*

**(Maria Friska Theresa L.)**

*“No matter who you are, where you’re from, your skin color, your gender identity.  
Speak yourself.”*

**(BTS)**

*“I am that I am”*

**(Bible, Exodus 3:14)**

*I sincerely dedicate this project to my family,  
and everyone who has helped me finishing this project.*

*Thank you for the greatest love and support.*

**THE AWAKENING OF THE BLACKS AGAINST RACIAL  
DISCRIMINATION PORTRAYED IN AVA DUVERNAY'S SELMA**

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Finally, the writer expects that this final project will be useful for the reader who wishes to learn something about Racial Discrimination and other things related to it.

Semarang, Juli 2019

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## ABSTRACT

In the project, the writer focuses on analyzing the power of unity of the Black people in Selma, Alabama who experience racial discrimination for years in *Selma* movie. The movie which is directed by Ava DuVernay depicts a story of Martin Luther King and the Black people in Selma fight for human rights and oppose racial discrimination. To collect the data, the writer applies library research. The purpose of this project is to analyze how the Black people in Selma are successful to arise from adversity by using *The Meaning of Black Consciousness In The Struggle For Liberation In South Africa* theory by Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu. The result of this study shows that Martin Luther King was meritorious in arousing the power of unity of the black people by the persuasive method he does in a church in Selma, Alabama. By using the persuasive method, the power to unite of the black people increases, so that the various obstacles they face do not make them stop to get their rights. Eventually,

Lyndon Johnson, the president, signs the Civil Rights Act 1965 so the Black people in Selma have rights to vote and to be voted.

Keywords : Racial Discrimination, Power of Unity, Black People, Selma, Movie

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Humans are created with different physical characteristics and properties which distinguish one another, for instance race. Oommen (1997: 90) classifies the human race in three big groups, namely Mongoloid race, Negroid race, and Caucasoid race. He also states that racial classification does not place race in hierarchical position or place a superior race to other races, but inside racial development becomes a social construction when certain racial societies believe and claim that their races are superior to other races which then encourage some of the racial communities to dominate and to control racial communities considered inferior. This belief is called racial discrimination, for example the belief in the superiority of the White race over Black race.

According to The Sentencing Project about *Criminals Justice Facts* in 2009, the United States is an area with a high level of racial discrimination. In 2009, 2/3 of the criminals who received life sentences were blacks. It is shown in the statistical reports provided by the U.S Bureau of Justice that Black men who were born in 2001 had 32% chance of going to prison, 17% of Latin men while only 6% of White men. The difficulty of eliminating discrimination against blacks is caused by the strong roots of racial discrimination according to history. Legally, racial discrimination

ended in 1965 which then emerged the Civil Rights Act 1965. This also became the most important part of the history of racial discrimination in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the Black people were previously looked down upon by the whites and ultimately created equality as portrayed in the *Selma* movie directed by Ava DuVernay.

*Selma* is a movie about the historical struggle of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to secure the voting rights for everyone - a dangerous and frightening campaign that culminate in an epic march from Selma to Montgomery and causes President Johnson to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964. *Selma* is expected to spur the spirit of pluralism in a liberal country and to reduce racial discrimination in the United States today. In this case, the writer tries to examine how the Black people in the movie arise their enthusiasm and strength to unite against the racial discrimination they have gained over the years using a theory by Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu in his journal written in 1976 entitled *The Meaning of Black Consciousness in the Struggle For Liberation in South Africa*.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Study**

1. To describe the evidences of racial discrimination issues in the *Selma* movie
2. To analyze how the main character, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., arises the power of unity of the Black community in the *Selma* movie
3. To describe the results of the power of unity of Black community against racial discrimination in the *Selma* movie

### **1.3 Scope of the Study**

The background of the movie is in Selma, Alabama which visualizes the condition of the city before the Civil Rights Act 1965. Through this project, the writer will focus on the racial discrimination accepted by the Black people in the movie and how Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the main character of *Selma* movie, brings the Black people passing through it.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Racial Discrimination**

In understanding the notions of racial discrimination, the concept of race must be explained. The origin of the term race has been popular around 1600, the first time put forward the idea of human differentiation based on categories or characteristics of skin color and face shape. Based on its physical characteristics, humans in the world can be divided into three major races as mentioned in the previous chapter. In *Measuring Racial Discrimination*, Blank, Dabady and Citro mention that racial discrimination based on different treatment in races which can harm a racial group and treatment on the basis of factors that are not sufficiently justified other than race that harm racial groups (2004:55). They also state that a member of one racial group is able to be treated less favorably than the other and suffers from negative consequences (2004:40).

One of the figures who introduced the concept of race was Charles Darwin. Darwin in his book entitled *The Origin of Species* in 1895 introduced race as a term which refers to biological and physical characteristics. One of the most obvious is the skin color which at the end that trigger the birth of movements that favor their own races. Darwin's theory is used as a basis for action to justify the control of race one over another, so racial superiority arise. A race feels superior to oppress other races that is considered as inferior. The concept of the superiority of this race then give birth to racial discrimination.



## 2.2 The Power of Unity of The Black People

The existence of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as the representation of Black people in the movie is able to make many people on his side. He mentions,

“I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.”

“I have a dream that one day little black boys and girls will be holding hands with little white boys and girls”

As cited in the *The Meaning of Black Consciousness In The Struggle For Liberation In South Africa* journal, Nengwekhulu asserts

“Black Consciousness therefore forces Black people to see themselves as full human beings, complete, full and total in themselves, and not as extensions of others”

“When Blacks come together and form a united Black solidarity movement; this is the objective we have set for ourselves”

“The concept of Black Consciousness implies the awareness by the Black people of the power they wield as a group, both economically and politically. Hence group cohesion and solidarity are important elements of that ideology, all the more so in view of the "divide and rule" colonial strategy practiced by the white establishment. Our endeavour, therefore, is to try to arouse the entire Black community to strive for its liberation.” (1976)

The essence of the power of unity is the realization and acceptance by Black people, to play a positive role in the right to vote and to be elected. They must effectively use the concept of group power and thus build a strong base to against suppression policies and oppressor rules. The power of unity fits to take as its ideology one which

heightens the awareness and consciousness of the Black people, and confronts them with the realities of the situation, for instance racial discrimination. Only in this way would it be possible to redirect Black energies towards the goals. The existence of racial differences does not necessarily mean that there are differences in rights and obligations between racial and ethnic groups in society and the state. Every citizen has the rights to obtain the same treatment to obtain civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in accordance with the provisions of the legislation, regardless of race.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

The study was conducted by means of library research. According to Jorge Marx Gomez and Sulaiman Mouselli in their *Modernizing the Academic Teaching and Research Environment* (2018: 8), library research is a type of research that is gotten principally using written materials located in libraries, World Wide Web, and in virtual databases. The materials were collected from the printed and electronic sources. By doing close reading and close viewing, the writer tries to understand and to review the movie in order to interpretate a brief passage of the text and to focus what the filmmaker is trying to convey. The main data of the project is *Selma* movie which is directed by Ava DuVernay. To analyze the power of unity of the black people in the *Selma* movie, the writer uses a theory by Nengwekhulu in his *The Meaning of Black Consciousness In The Struggle For Liberation In South Africa* journal. The theory pervades the realization of the Black people of being full human beings and brings the Black people into a community development projects to rise their power as one.

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Racial Discrimination

Based on the previous chapter, racial discrimination in this movie is originated from race classifications, which consists of Mongoloid race, Negroid race, and Caucasoid race. According to Morgan in his book entitled *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the 18th Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (1998), in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Black people had experienced slavery because they were considered the lowest class race. He also states likewise with the existence of other races who feel that they have high superiority, the willing to master other races is the reason for discrimination against race. It is possible if racial discrimination is still carried over into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as happens in the movie *Selma*.



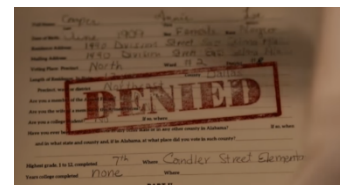
Picture 1. 1

Annie gets question how many judges in her town (00:08:10)



Picture 1. 2

Annie is asked to mention all of them (00:08:18)



Picture 1. 3

Annie can not answer it and gets denied (00:08:28)

In the pictures 1. 1 to 1. 3, there are some evidences that the Black community still does not have complete freedom in the state. Annie Lee Cooper cannot get his right to run for politics, only because she is a black person. In her selection, she receives questions that does not make sense.

A white man : How many judges are there in the city of Alabama?

Annie Cooper : 67.

A white man : Mention it! (*Selma*, 08:07–08:28)

These questions are only to trap Annie Lee Cooper, so that she fails to proceed to the next stage.



Picture 2. 1

Dr.King explains the problems to Mr. President  
(00:10:50)



Picture 2.2

Mr. President refuses Martin's request  
(00:12:06)



Picture 2. 3

Dr.King tries to convince Mr.President  
(00:12:40)

Another scenes for instance in the picture 2. 2 to 3. 3 which show racial discrimination are when four black children die because of the bomb in the church and the killers are free and do not get punishment for what they have done. That is what makes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., insist on meeting with the President to give

rights to Black people. However, Mr. President ignores the request by saying that there are still a lot of problems that have to be eradicated, for example poverty.



Picture 3. 1

White polices against  
the Black people  
(01:14:56)



Picture 3. 2

70 Millions people watch  
it on their TVs  
(01:15:52)



Picture 3. 3

Many Black people get  
hurt  
(01:17:35)

Because there is a doubt in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he does not participate in carrying out the first march from Selma to Montgomery. As the result, there is a war carried out by the police against Black people. Whether using horses or not, all the police hit the Black people who demonstrate at that time using their spiked sticks and guns. That causes a lot of casualties. A hospital in Selma reports that many Black people suffer from broken ribs, legs, hands, and skulls. Therefore, the incident is called Bloody Sunday which is watched by 70 Millions people on TV. The most terrible thing is that this attack has become a spectacle for White people who are among the demonstrations and the police. They actually cheer, instead of helping the Black people who struggle with pain.

## 4.2 The Power of Unity of The Black People in *Selma* Movie

### 4. 2. 1. Martin Luther King Arises the Power of Unity of the Black People



Picture 4. 1



Picture 4. 2



Picture 4. 3

Dr. King speech at a church Jimmie in Selma Jackson (00:26:13) (00:55:32)	Dr. King invites the black people (00:27:51)	Dr. King's feelings to Lee
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With the presence of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Selma, the Black community in Selma becomes more passionate about showing to the entire United States that they have the same rights as White people. Even so, it does not mean that Dr. King is the one who is possible to change the situation in Selma, Alabama. Dr. King only carries out his duty to open the minds of the Black people in Selma, Alabama by persuasive method he does in a church in Selma to unite and to fight injustice, as explained in the pictures 4. 1 to 4. 3. Even Dr. King also admits that he is not able manage his own life, he still needs others help in his life. It is the same as the problem in Selma, Alabama which does not only require one person to move but precisely the movement of the unity of all Black people in Selma. Dr. King becomes a bridge between the Black people and the president, so that their voices are heard and also being the leader in a march to demand their rights.



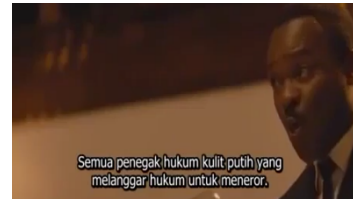
Picture 5. 1

Dr. King questioning who killed Jimmie Lee Jackson (00:53:13)



Picture 5. 2

"Racism Killed Our Brother" written on the church's wall (00:53:32)



Picture 5. 3

Dr. King tries to open everyone's eyes (00:53:39)

In addition to the Bloody Sunday, the death of a young man named Jimmie Lee Jackson also becomes a focus of the movie. Jimmie Lee Jackson is shot by a police in Selma which is not even concerned by the local government. The death of Jimmie Lee Jackson makes the Black community realizes that no one else can be a victim. The writing in the picture 5. 1 is the proof of them realizing that so far their lives have been limited by racial discrimination and they no longer want social inequalities to kill their race. This also becomes the answer of Dr. King's question about who kills Jimmie Lee Jackson in the picture 5. 2. The speech of Dr. King in picture 5. 3 invites the Black people in Selma to open their eyes to be brave to express their feelings to the government because they are also parts of the country.



#### 4. 2. 2. The Black People Arise Their Power of Unity



Picture 6. 1

Miss Boynton talks to  
Corretta King  
(00:41:50)



Picture 6. 2

Miss Boynton convinces  
Corretta King  
(00:42:08)



Picture 6. 3

Miss Boynton tries to  
strengthen Corretta King  
(00:42:10)

The pictures 6. 1 to 6. 3 show how Miss Boynton convinces Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s wife, Corretta King, to continue to defend the Black community in Selma, Alabama. In the scene, Corretta King looks afraid about the condition of her family. Not only the Black community in Selma who feel insecure about their lives, but also Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s family. Corretta King and her family always receive death threats while defending the black community in Selma. Miss Boynton tries to help by convincing Corretta King that what she and her husband have done are good things. She also explains that although Corretta and the Black community in Selma, Alabama come from different places of residence, they are from the same ancestors. Miss Boynton adds that they are from a strong nation to encourage Corretta to remain strong in carrying out these threats.



Picture 7. 1

Dr. King invites the Black  
People to march  
(00:28:06)



Picture 7. 2

The march could threaten  
soul  
(00:28:15)



Picture 7. 3

Dr. King's encourage to  
move forward  
(00:28:28)

As stated in the previous chapter, Nengwekhulu in his *The Meaning of Black Consciousness In The Struggle For Liberation In South Africa* asserts that in the Black Consciousness movement are determined to march forward, so the Black people will continue to march until they achieve their victory. Dr. Martin Luther King also encourages the spirit of the Black people to do march from Selma to Montgomery. From the picture 7. 1 to 7. 3 in the minutes of 00:28:05 until 00:28:30, Dr. King conyes that despite destroying peace and having great risks for instance the possibility of going to prison, they must remain to unite in achiving their dreams to be able to vote and be elected. At the minutes of 00:28:24 they shout the phrase *Give us the vote!* which means they realize that this is the time for them to be able to achieve meaningful rights.



Picture 8. 1

Dr. King leads the second march

(01:25:10)



Picture 8. 2

Black people are assisted by several white people for March

(01:25:15)



Picture 8. 3

The second march

(01:26:07)

After experiencing great upheaval at the first march which causes dozens of black people who are rushed to the hospital for treatment, and afterwards dubbed as the Bloody Sunday, the Black community still wants to hold a second demonstration with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as the leader. In this second march, the Black people are assisted by Black people from other towns and also White people who still care about equality, for instance James Reeb from Boston in the scene 01:24:46 until 01:25:02 who comes to join the second march because he couldn't keep quiet seeing the Black people in Selma, Alabama receive attacks to get their rights. It explains that the Black community will continue to hold large-scale of demonstrations until they receive their rights to vote and to be elected.

#### 4. 2. 3. The Result of the Power of Unity of the Black People



Picture 8. 1

Mr. President announces  
the Civil Right Act 1965  
(01:49:57)



Picture 8. 2

The second march to  
Montgomery  
(01:53:47)



Picture 8. 3

The real march happened  
in 1965  
(01:54:35)

As explained in the previous chapter on Nengwekhulu's *The Meaning of Black Consciousness* in 1976, King asserts that the consciousness to rise again could bring the Black race to have well-being life. King also says that he is not able to do this alone, he needs the reinforcements from the entire community both Black people and White people as seen in the picture 7. 2 who are concerned with Selma to unite in a peaceful march carried out from Selma to Montgomery for the umpteenth time after the announcement of the Civil Rights Act 1965 in the picture 7. 1. The picture 7. 3 shows the original video of a peaceful march from Selma to Montgomery carried out by the Black community from Selma with the help from the people who support the Civil Rights Movement.



Picture 9. 1

Celebration of Civil Rights  
Act 1965  
(01:56:59)



Picture 9. 2

John Lewis becomes a  
US Congressman  
(01:57:50)



Picture 9. 3

The gratefulness of the  
Black people in Selma  
(01:59:27)

At the end of the story, the Black people of Selma finally get what they have dreamed of. The Civil Rights Movement has the effect which finally their desire to vote and to be elected is realized after Mr. President signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1965, and no one could prevent Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from making a speech about their victory witnessed by all Black people from Selma as seen in the picture 8. 1 and 8. 3. The Civil Rights Movement also has a positive impact for example in the picture 8. 2, the appointment of Black people in Selma, for instance John Lewis. He is appointed as US Congressman for 28 years for 5 districts in Georgia. Besides John Lewis, Andrew Young is also appointed as an ambassador of the United Nation under the leadership of President Carter. Young is also appointed in Mayor of Atlanta for two periods. The success in achieving the right to vote is caused by the power of unity of the Black people who are conscious that they can change the destiny made by humans. Other than that, they are parts of the United States of America who have the

same rights as White people. The power to rise together makes the Black people have a strong foundation to fight racial discrimination.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

According to the discussion which mentioned on the previous chapter, it can be concluded that although it is in a post-modern era, racial discrimination is still a major problem in Selma, Alabama. There is one main actor in this movie, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who has a big influence in the 1965 Civil Rights Movement. As the title mentioned, the setting is in Selma, Alabama. In addition to the difficulty of seeking rights, the Black community in Selma, Alabama have to go through many obstacles which cause many casualties, for instance the Bloody Sunday event. Every individual feels the struggles against racial discrimination, for example a grandfather who lose his grandson who is shot by a white police and Annie Lee Cooper who is rejected when going to run for politics.

Martin Luther King is very meritorious in arousing the power of unity of the Black people. He is the one who invites the Black people to hold demonstrations. The Black people conduct large-scale of march until they achieve their victory which is the assignment of the Civil Rights Act 1965. The concept of group power builds a strong base against racial discrimination. Their struggle stops when Mr. President agrees to sign the Civil Rights Act 1965 which allows all people from all races to vote and to be elected. It is possible to happen because the Black people unite to fight the racial discrimination and get some help from the outer people who care about what happen in Selma, Alabama.

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